

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.

MASS MEDIA: THE TENTH PRINCIPLE OF WAR?

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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10 November 1995

Paper directed by Captain D. Watson, USN
Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department



Accession For	
NTIS CRA&I	<input checked="checked" type="checkbox"/>
DTIC TAB	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unannounced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Justification _____	
By _____	
Distribution /	
Availability Codes	
Dist	Avail and / or Special
A-1	

19950417 047

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 5

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A

Approved for public release;
Distribution Unlimited

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. Report Security Classification: Unclassified			
2. Security Classification Authority: NA			
3. Declassification/Downgrading Schedule: NA			
4. Distribution/Availability of Report: DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED.			
5. Name of Performing Organization: Joint Military Operations Department			
6. Office Symbol: 1C		7. Address: Naval War College, 686 Cushing Rd., Newport, RI 02841-5010	
8. Title (Unclassified): Mass Media: The Tenth Principle of War?			
9. Personal Authors: Lieutenant Commander Lisa Squire, USN			
10. Type of Report: Final		11. Date of Report: 13 February 1995	
12. Page Count: 15			
13. Supplementary Notation: A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.			
14. Ten key words that relate to your paper: Media, Mass Media, Public Affairs, Public Relations, Information, Combat Coverage, Military-Media Relations, Military Media Strategy, War Correspondents.			
15. Abstract: Information has become a viable weapon of war that can be used to strategic, operational and tactical advantage by both enemy and friendly forces. Mass media is the agent by which military information is collected, interpreted and transmitted to worldwide audiences and therefore, has tremendous power to affect the outcome of military operations. The commander who embraces the inevitability of media presence in the theater of operations and plans accordingly, can achieve significant operational advantages. In short, mass media has become a high stakes player in the military planning equation and, for better or worse, will play a major role in formulating the way future wars are fought. Properly planned for, mass media is a valuable--even essential--tool in the operational art of linking battlefield successes to the desired strategic outcome. The operational commander must firmly establish mass media as a potential force multiplier and integrate this "media concept" in the planning, execution and termination phases of military operations. Application of mass media as a principle of war is a reasonable approach to this end.			
16. Distribution / Availability of Abstract:	Unclassified	Same As Rpt	DTIC Users
18. Abstract Security Classification: Unclassified			
19. Name of Responsible Individual: Chairman, Joint Military Operations Department			
20. Telephone: (401) 841-3414/4120		21. Office Symbol: 1C	

Abstract of

MASS MEDIA: THE TENTH PRINCIPLE OF WAR?

Information has become a viable weapon of war that can be used to strategic, operational and tactical advantage by both enemy and friendly forces. Mass media is the agent by which military information is collected, interpreted and transmitted to worldwide audiences and therefore, has tremendous potential to affect the outcome of military operations. The commander who embraces the inevitability of media presence in the theater of operations and plans accordingly, can achieve significant operational advantages. In short, mass media has become a high stakes player in the military planning equation and, for better or worse, will play a major role in formulating the way future wars are fought. Properly planned for, mass media is a valuable--even essential--tool in the operational art of linking battlefield successes to the desired strategic outcome. The operational commander must firmly establish mass media as a potential force multiplier and integrate this "media concept" in the planning, execution and termination phases of military operations. Application of mass media as a principle of war is a reasonable approach to this end.

"The nine principles of war provide general guidance for the conduct of war at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. They are the enduring bedrock of Army doctrine. The original principles adopted by the Army [in 1921] have withstood the test of time."
FM 100-5

"There is a constant often urgent need to coordinate the various aspects of the informational instrument of national security strategy, public affairs and public diplomacy. This information is crucial to the success of any contemporary military operation because it involves the support of the American people, allies and friendly nations and the morale of the opposing side." Joint Pub 1

The end of the Cold War has given impetus to fundamental changes in the U.S. National Security Strategy and created an overarching need to rethink the way military planners prepare for and conduct military operations at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. The U.S. National Military Strategy reflects these changes with a new emphasis on adaptive regional planning using a smaller, base force to counter a now multi-polar threat. This new, evolving and dangerous world order poses an unprecedented challenge for the military leaders charged with planning and executing future military operations, specifically: the Commander in Chiefs (CINCs) of the unified and specified combatant commands.

Joint doctrine embraces the principles of war as a viable tool to "aid military thinking when planning or conducting military action"¹ Further defined, the principles of war are "distilled history...derived from profound studies of the successes and failures of the past".² Unquestionably, the nine principles of war have withstood the test of time and are as applicable to modern war planners as when first envisioned. However, these nine principles no longer adequately encompass the entire spectrum of modern war planning. New

¹ U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces, Joint Pub 1, Washington, D.C: National Defense University Press, 1993.

² C.R. Brown, "The Principles of War," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, June 1949, p. 623.

technology, the subsequent onset of the "information age" and a post-Cold War climate of global change and uncertainty demands an expansion of the basic tenants of war.

Information has become a viable weapon of war that can be used to strategic, operational and tactical advantage by both enemy and friendly forces. Mass media is the agent by which information is collected, interpreted and transmitted to worldwide audiences and therefore, has tremendous power to affect the outcome of any military operation. The commander who embraces the inevitability of mass media presence in the theater of operations and plans accordingly, can achieve significant operational advantages. In short, mass media has become a high-stakes player in the military planning equation and, for better or worse, will play a major role in formulating the way future wars are fought. Establishing mass media as the tenth principle of war will ensure due focus on mass media--commensurate with the potential effect on mission accomplishment--throughout the planning, execution and termination phases of military operations.

MASS MEDIA DEFINED

*"The press is the watchdog over institutions of power, be they military, political, economic or social. Its job is to inform the people about the doings of their institutions."*³

Mass media encompasses a broad spectrum of information products ranging from communications networks (wire services) to broadcast journalism (television and radio) to "print" products (magazines, newspapers, journals and books). Different media products require different journalistic approaches: dramatic action shots for television, in-depth interviews for journalists, photographic essays for magazines. Although these diverse and often conflicting demands are of paramount concern to military professionals coordinating media requirements at the tactical level of war, the operational commander must view mass

³ Bernard E. Trainor, "The Military and the Media: A Troubled Embrace," Parameters: Journal of the U.S. Army War College, December 1990, p. 4.

media on a much broader scope. Modern technology has *"blurred many of the distinctions between the way broadcast and print media produce news reports. Information is now gathered, processed and disseminated through electronic means Products differ only in their final format: print, television and radio."*⁴ Although this is a somewhat simplistic approach to mass media, it does clearly illustrate the impact modern technology has had on the news industry and more importantly, the potential of the "technologically advanced" mass media to influence future military operations.

Mass media, as a principle of war, extends beyond television images and newspaper headlines to encompass all sources of information which could potentially influence military operations and ultimately, national strategy. In this sense, mass media includes information interpreted and reported by the international press corps, information supplied "officially and unofficially" through government channels and instantaneous information capabilities resulting from the expanding global communications network.

MILITARY-MEDIA RELATIONS

"The first issue in military operations is that no information of value shall be given to the enemy. The first issue in newspaper work and broadcasting is wide open publicity. It is your job and mine to try and reconcile those sometimes diverse considerations."
General Dwight D. Eisenhower before the invasion of Normandy

The current military-media relationship is strained at best and downright hostile at times. Recent military operations have only fueled the disparity between the media's vision and the military's perception of what wartime press coverage should entail. Ironically, the missions of the military and the media are rooted in the same fundamental principle: to protect and preserve democracy in the United States. Each organization is equally vital to the continued health of our republican form of government. In fact, "freedom of the press" is one of the constitutional rights all servicemembers are sworn to protect. Unfortunately, any common

⁴ Gordon I. Peterson, "Joint Operations from a PA Perspective," Public Affairs Communicator, May/June 1992, p. 4.

ground shared by these powerful organizations tends to be mitigated during the heat of battle as each attempts to convey their perceptions of the "war experience" to an insatiable worldwide audience.

In wartime, the military is the source of information and mass media the mechanism for disseminating this information to the public at large. The media views themselves as the independent "voice" of the operation and the military as the obstacle in their quest for "uncensored" information. Military distrust of the media stems from the belief that a reporter's primary concern is "getting the by-line" even when weighed against operational security requirements and potential risk to American lives. Former Secretary of the Navy James Webb describes a military perspective of the battlefield:

*"A military commander in a fluid operational environment is in a delicate position which often demands that he conceal his intentions and even his alternatives from a potential enemy. When his mission is complete, he will be held fully accountable, in graphic terms for the rest of his life"*⁵

The media disputes this line of reasoning arguing that the military arbitrarily restricts information that may reflect poorly on military leadership or preparedness. Biased perspectives--by both sides--serve only to perpetuate an already poor military-media relationship. In spite of evolving policies and major concessions by both organizations, military-media relations continue to degenerate.

Military leaders must take the initiative in negotiating mutually agreeable solutions for integrating mass media into future military operations. The current military mind-set centers on the negative aspects of media involvement in military operations: but what of the advantages? Properly planned for, mass media is a valuable--even essential-- tool in the operational art of linking battlefield successes to the desired strategic outcome. Employing

⁵ James H. Webb, Jr., "The Military and the Media," Marine Corps Gazette, November 1984 p. 35.

mass media as a principle of war will assist operational commanders in achieving an appropriate balance between media access and safeguarding operational security.

MILITARY-MEDIA FOCUS IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER

"Wars today are waged by governments, and in democratic societies governments must win public support from their own citizens before they can fight and win a war against their enemies." ⁶

Operational thinking requires a broad and balanced perspective of the changing strategic landscape. Rules will continue to change as new information technology invades every aspect of modern civilization, including the military. The emerging role of mass media in military operations has created a closer link between the strategic and tactical levels of war. Messages originating from the battlefield are received not only by American citizens but also a world-wide audience, the adversary included. Media access to the front line means the actions of field forces have an unprecedented opportunity to affect subsequent strategic decisions. The net effect is a significantly decreased margin for error in the battlefield. In short, mass media has changed the way war is waged.

The changing face of the battlefield. The widespread political instability and turmoil of today's global environment limits the ability of defense planners to accurately predict the location and nature of future wars. However, several conditions will undoubtedly prevail. Warning and response time will be limited. The smaller, "right-sized" military forces will be rapidly deployed from CONUS bases to the "hotspot du jour". Mass media involvement from the onset is virtually assured.

Major news organizations routinely track and readily report unusual troop movements. Commanders can no longer rely on the ability to deploy forces covertly. Members of the foreign press--firmly entrenched and actively reporting from global trouble zones--may well

⁶ Ray Eldon Hiebert, "Public Relations as a Weapon of Modern Warfare," Public Relations Review, Summer 1991, p.108.

act as a welcoming committee for American forces arriving in the theater. In fact, it is not implausible to expect the international press corps to initially have more reporters in the theater than the assigned CINC has troops. Military commanders must anticipate, legitimize and employ media presence in the battlefield to operational advantage.

Evolving military-diplomatic role. The U.S. national military strategy of adaptive regional planning dictates an increased use of the military in support of diplomatic efforts. Future employment of military forces is likely to focus on reassuring allies or a "show of force" to reinforce desired behavior in potential adversaries. This theme of "friendly reassurance" means CINCs must plan not only for employing forces for potential combat operations but must also develop complimentary economic and diplomatic options. Media "spin" could be the determining factor in how the application of force is perceived by the target audience.⁷

War termination in the New World Order is more likely to be determined by negotiation than decisive victory on the battlefield. Moreover, instant access to battlefield can have enormous repercussions at the negotiation table. The CINC must relate the "means" of victory in the battlefield to a strategic end state that can withstand the scrutiny of world public opinion and lead to consensus during subsequent negotiations. The American public is unlikely to tolerate long wars with massive casualties. The bloodier and more drawn out the battle the more likely public opinion will force a less than optimum negotiated settlement.

Fight combined and fight joint. Future military operations will undoubtedly be comprised of multi-national forces organized under the auspices of international bodies such as the United Nations. Coalition building and achieving unity of effort among multi-service and multi-national forces will be vital to success. The task becomes even more challenging when coalitions include countries with historic antagonisms: a distinct possibility in the new

⁷ Frank J. Stech, "Winning CNN Wars," Parameters: U.S. Army War College Quarterly, Autumn 1994, p. 47.

world order. In fact, mobilizing public opinion--american and international--behind coalition objectives may well become the center of gravity for all future military operations. The government must establish a national consensus behind the war effort in which the American public believes the value of the impending military action is worth the risk of American lives. Mass media can generate American and international support--either for or against--a cause.

The changing face of the media. The end of the military draft in 1973, means fewer Americans have experienced military life first-hand. The impact is twofold: military terminology, strategy and culture are not only unfamiliar to a majority of adult Americans but also to the journalists assigned to report military issues. The recent peace dividend means "seasoned" war correspondents are now reaching retirement age. It stands to reason that the new crop of journalists, untrained in military operations, may unintentionally report inaccurate or misleading information. The problem is further exacerbated by the continuing pressure on major news organizations to cut costs. The result: fewer military experts on the payroll.⁸ Similar financial constraints on news agencies in developing Third World countries makes it cheaper to buy news coverage from Western agencies than to pay for internally produced reports.⁹ Consequently, inexperienced Western journalists are translating military actions--both U.S. and international--to a world-wide audience: occasionally with inaccurate or misleading interpretations.

Mass media as a tool of the adversary. Department of Defense (DOD) policy recognizes the potential for enemy exploitation of mass media in order to discredit the United States and mobilize world opposition to our policies. Propaganda, misinformation and fictionalized reporting are tactics which have been employed--with the perhaps unwitting aid of the international press--by past adversaries. American correspondents, broadcasting from behind

⁸ Trainor, p. 11.

⁹ Robert MacNeil, "The World Through a Lens," Harvard International Review, Spring 1993, p. 64.

enemy lines during Desert Storm, provided emotional and erroneous reports of coalition attacks on Iraqi civilian institutions. CNN, the source of these reports, was hotly criticized for "serving as Saddam Hussein's broadcasting service".¹⁰ The ensuing public debate opened a new chapter in the annals of combat coverage: the issue of media neutrality. Some journalist's contend that in a combat situation national loyalty is superseded by the media's need to serve the greater public interest. Right or wrong, the issue of media neutrality will escalate in future wars as American journalists report from both sides of the battlefield. The operational commander must educate the media on the "how and why" of military operations to prevent misinterpretation of U.S. objectives and potential media buy-in to enemy propaganda.

Mass media is a powerful tool which, when properly applied, can have a positive influence on the outcome of military operations. If neglected, mass media can easily be manipulated to the adversary's advantage. The operational commander must articulate a clear sense of the media's place within the wider strategy and firmly establish mass media as a potential force multiplier rather than an obstacle to overcome. Application of mass media as a principle of war is a reasonable approach to this end.

CURRENT MILITARY PUBLIC AFFAIRS POLICY

Joint Pub 5-03.2 defines the public affairs mission as: *"To keep the American people informed of operations to the maximum extent possible within the constraints of OPSEC and personnel safety, the commander's gaining and keeping of the initiative, achievement of surprise and superiority, and security of forces against attack."*

In essence, if not in practice, joint doctrine has already elevated "mass media" to principle of war status. Translating this policy into action has been an ongoing challenge for defense planners. Current DOD public affairs doctrine is a composite of "lessons learned" from press coverage of past military operations. Military commanders have employed a variety of

¹⁰ John Corry, "TV News and the Neutrality Principle," *Commentary*, May 1991, p. 24.

strategies--with varying degrees of success--to accommodate the presence of journalists in the warzone. While a panacea has not yet been found, it is increasingly apparent that successful military-media interaction hinges on the planning, preparation and commitment of the military and civilian leadership responsible for the operation.

Perhaps the single greatest influence on current military-media policy resulted from the military decision, with presidential approval, to exclude the press from the 1983 invasion of Grenada. Justification for this restrictive policy ranged from the need to protect operational security and tactical surprise to ensuring the safety of reporters. The media claimed their exclusion was nothing more than an attempt to cover up military incompetence. Hindsight suggests the decision was, in fact, driven by the Joint Task Force Commander's lack of faith in the media's ability to provide fair and unbiased wartime coverage.¹¹ In response to the post-Grenada media cries of foul play, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff convened the Media-Military Relations Panel (aka the Sidel Panel) to identify potential solutions to the military-media disputes.

The Sidel Panel concluded that "the U.S. news media (should) cover U.S. military operations to the maximum degree possible consistent with security and the safety of U.S. forces".¹² Two major--and controversial--policies emerged from the Sidel Panel. First, a National Media Pool was established, under DOD sponsorship, to deploy with initial combat forces and provide pooled information to be shared "non-competitively" with all news sources. Second, military escorts would be assigned to "assist correspondents in covering the operation adequately".¹³ Military interpretation of these policies during subsequent

¹¹ Trainor, p. 9.

¹² Lloyd J. Matthews, Newsman and National Defense: Is Conflict Inevitable? (McLean, VA: Brassey's (U.S.) Inc., 1991), p. 89.

¹³ Peter Braestrup, Battlelines: Report on the Twentieth Century Task Force on the Military and the Media (New York: Priority Press Publications, 1985), p. 167.

operations--notably, Panama (1989) and Desert Storm (1991)-- continues to draw heated criticism from major news organizations.

In an ongoing effort to address media concerns, DOD, with media consensus, adopted nine principles for combat coverage in May 1992. Briefly summarized, the rules provide for:

- Open, independent reporting of U.S. military operations.
- Pools, although appropriate for some events, are not the standard means for covering U.S. military operations.
- Military credentialing of journalists in a combat zone. Journalists must abide by a clear set of military security ground rules which, if violated, can result in suspension of credentials and expulsion of the journalist from the combat zone.
- Media access to all major units (special operations restrictions apply).
- Military PA officers will act as liaisons but not interfere with the reporting process.
- Pool transportation by military vehicles and aircraft.
- Timely, secure, compatible transmission of pool material and independent coverage on military networks (consistent with capabilities). The military may not ban communications systems operated by news organizations.

*** News organizations proposed an additional principle barring military review of news material. Although this proposal was not approved, DOD did agree to impose mandatory reviews only when operational security was a consideration.¹⁴

Joint doctrine uniformly acknowledges the increasing role of mass media in the warfare planning equation. Basic National Defense Doctrine (Joint Pub 0-1) emphasizes the importance of coordinating informational efforts and the difficulty this presents to the defense planner *"because so many government and private agencies (e.g. the media), both domestic and international, have legitimate roles in obtaining and providing national security related materials."* Specific guidelines for incorporating public affairs (PA) considerations in the operational planning process are provided in the Joint Operation Planning and Execution System (JOPES).

JOPES clearly defines CINC responsibilities, command relationships and procedures for executing the PA mission during crises, extended operations and war. DOD principles of

¹⁴ News Release, Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense, No. 241-92, May 21, 1992.

combat coverage are incorporated in the JOPES planning process. Mission security and safety of U.S. forces are achieved by establishing media ground rules and accreditation procedures which, if violated, will result in the offender's exclusion from the theater. The JOPES "recipe" provides for ample coverage of military operations while ensuring the CINC retains some measure of control over information emanating from his area of responsibility. JOPES PA policy provides an excellent "how to" guide for the operational commander in planning for mass media at the tactical level of war. It does not, however, address the need to apply mass media as a principle of war across the entire spectrum of operational planning. As a result, potential benefits and/or constraints derived from mass media participation in military operations may not be employed to strategic, operational or tactical advantage.

"MASS MEDIA" APPLIED AS A PRINCIPLE OF WAR

"Public support of the American people rests on two conditions: their belief in the justness of the cause at stake, and their trust and confidence in the leadership engaged in that pursuit." Joint Pub 1

Media access to the battlefield can enhance or impede mission accomplishment. Military commanders, well acquainted with the power of the press, have tried numerous strategies to counter potential media-inflicted damage. Past tactics included withholding information, restricting access to the frontlines and imposing field censorship: none of which provided an enduring solution. One of the most successful military-media strategies in recent years was employed by the U.S. Marines during Operation Desert Storm. Surprisingly--in view of inbred military-media ill will--the Marine formula was based on mutual trust and cooperation. Scott Simon of National Public Radio recounts one (of many) Marine-media success stories:

"Several members of the press were fully briefed before the ground offensive that the amphibious landing was an allied deception. The Marines briefed the press to prevent them from inadvertently blowing the story by naively covering it. The witting members of the press, sworn to secrecy, maintained the security of the deception and supported it with continued press coverage of the practice Marine landings."¹⁵

¹⁵ Stech, p. 56.

The Marines successfully applied mass media as a principle of war throughout Operation Desert Storm. The result was overwhelmingly favorable press and, by some accounts, a disproportionate share of the credit for the success of Desert Storm.¹⁶

Lessons learned from past military operations clearly indicate that, properly planned for, media integration with operational forces can provide significant advantages. Just as surely, failure to adequately plan for mass media can result in unforeseen and potentially devastating consequences. Broadened application of mass media as a principle of war requires an awareness of the strengths, constraints and restraints of the current operating environment.

The military-media paradigm. The enduring military-media animosity tends to reinforce restrictive military interpretation of media-related policies. "Containment" of the press is perceived as less risky than potential security leaks emanating from an unconstrained press. Unchecked, these military "tendencies" could result in an institutionalized failure to plan and employ mass media to military advantage. The existing military-media paradigm must be changed. A logical starting point is with the military leadership charged with planning and executing military operations. CINCs must incorporate a mass media policy within clearly defined military objectives which establishes a solid foundation for detailed support planning. Field acceptance hinges on the strength of the commander's conviction in dictating his media policy. Education and training of both media and military personnel--at all levels of command--is an absolute necessity to achieving unity of effort in the battlefield. Problems arise when members of the press are required to interpret, justify, condemn or condone policy. Service personnel are equally important in this equation. Decisions, actions or off-hand comments by junior servicemen, captured and translated by the media, may have dramatic and far-reaching consequences. CINCs must ensure a unified military-media effort is firmly

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 47.

established before the outbreak of hostilities. If not, military-media chaos in the battlefield is likely to erupt.

The merging of the levels of warfare. Media images televised "direct from the battlefield" create increased pressure for rapid response from strategic levels. This, in turn, provides a compelling incentive for operational commanders to ensure superiors are fully apprised of changing battlefield dynamics. Navy PA analysis of Desert Storm concluded: "The objective [of a PA plan] is to push accurate information to the seat of government quickly....we are in a race with CNN to keep our superiors informed."¹⁷ Instant communications tends to merge the distinctions between the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war and poses a temptation--and danger-- for decisionmakers to reach swift conclusions based on media "interpretations" of the battlefield. Prior planning for mass media's role in combat coverage is absolutely imperative. At a minimum, the CINC must establish procedures for the rapid assessment of the accuracy of media generated news reports, a damage control system for inaccurate reports and above all, constant, accurate communications with superiors in the chain of command.

Proper, timely dissemination of information extends beyond the CINC's realm of responsibility. Public backing of the national agenda--easily influenced by messages from the battlefield--is of vital importance at the strategic levels of war. Instant communications raises a compelling new issue: what combat information is releasable...when...by whom? This hot topic resulted in frequent clashes between General Schwarzkopf in Riyadh and the Pentagon on who would release important details during Operation Desert Storm.¹⁸ Planning and employing mass media in a combat situation may have far-reaching military and sometimes, personal, consequences for the operational commander.

¹⁷ Peterson, p. 5.

¹⁸ Molly Moore, A Woman at War: Storming Kuwait with the U.S. Marines (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1993), p. 131.

Information Dominance. In the New World Order, victory will go to the commander who can rapidly access, validate and disseminate pertinent information to the appropriate audience. The ability to collate and assimilate information from all sources is a vital component of modern warfare. Media generated information, properly analyzed and authenticated by military intelligence, can serve as "force multiplier" if skillfully employed by military planners. The media provides on-sight monitoring of developments in areas where the military may not have forces. Not only is this information of immense value to operational commanders in the deliberate planning process, it could prove invaluable to strategic planners in assessing international reaction to U.S. foreign policy. In a combat environment, media coverage--meshed with all-source intelligence--may indicate deviations in enemy plans and intentions which could be employed to U.S. advantage. Moreover, constraints inherent to the technologically advanced battlefield may be mitigated with media assistance. Verification of battle damage inflicted by modern weapon systems--launched at ranges well beyond visual range of the enemy--may be obtained by analysis of mass media products. Information generated by the mass media can be employed to military advantage at all levels of war. However, media-generated information is only useful if military decision-makers recognize the potential benefits and actively employ media products to military advantage.

CONCLUSION

"Our influence will increasingly be defined more by the quality of our ideas, values and leadership...than by the predominance of our military capabilities" US National Security Strategy

The changing dynamics of the post-Cold War strategic environment demands a more aggressive and proactive approach to mass media as a principle of war. The New World Order has created a closer link between U.S. political and military functions and an increased focus on employing military forces in a diplomatic context. Future military operations will necessarily depend on building coalitions and engendering consensus among joint and multi-

national forces. Success in modern warfare will hinge on the ability of the military and civilian leadership to mobilize public support behind national military objectives. U.S. armed forces cannot expect to sustain, let alone win, a modern war without the consent and approval of the American people. Mass media--the essential intermediary between the military and the American public--is a potent force in shaping public opinion. Hence the importance of integrating mass media in the modern warfighting equation.

Technological advancements have provided mass media with the capacity to provide instantaneous combat coverage to a world-wide audience. The result is an ability to exert tremendous influence on military leadership--U.S., coalition and enemy--at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. Failure to properly assess, compensate for and/or actively employ mass media to operational advantage could have an immediate, detrimental effect on all levels of war. Conversely, cultivating and capitalizing on strengths derived from the mass media could provide the requisite advantage needed to achieve military success.

The current military-media paradigm of mutual antipathy negates true unity of effort in the battlefield. Unless a non-antagonistic military-media environment is established prior to future war planning efforts, mass media could be relegated to a back seat in future military operations. If so, potential media-driven advantages may be overlooked. Application of mass media as a principle of war will not only serve as a guide to focus military planning efforts in this changing strategic environment, but may help neutralize military-media hostility--the ultimate peace dividend of the New World Order!

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